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LOWLAND SOLDIER

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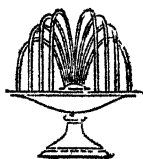
ETON PORTRAIT

BEYOND THE CHINDWIN

LOWLAND SOLDIER

By

BERNARD FERGUSON



COLLINS

14 ST. JAMES'S PLACE LONDON

1945

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To
A. M. F.

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PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN
COLLINS CLEAR-TYPE PRESS : LONDON AND GLASGOW
1945

Contents

	<i>Foreword</i>	7
I	HILL PATHS	
	<i>The Heather House</i>	9
	<i>Tinkler</i>	10
	<i>Rain over Tweeddale</i>	11
	<i>Loch Lagganside</i>	12
	<i>Post-Easter</i>	13
	<i>Trunk Call</i>	14
	<i>October</i>	16
	<i>To the Youngest Beater of All</i>	18
II	COUNTRY FOLK	
	<i>The Kulkerran Shepherd (Psalm xiii)</i>	20
	<i>The Tryst</i>	21
	<i>Old Woman's Song</i>	22
	<i>Traffic Lights Come to Pulquhanity</i>	23
	<i>The Cockney</i>	24
	<i>Matthew</i>	25
III.	LITTLE SHIPS	
	<i>The Lights of Clyde</i>	27
	<i>Caller Herrin' : New Style</i>	29
	<i>The Ship's Fly (an Epic of the Highland Brigade Yacht Club)</i>	30
	<i>War and Easdale</i>	32

IV. PEACE AND WAR

	PAGE
<i>The Regiment Goes North</i>	34
<i>"My Home"</i>	35
<i>In Camp: Church Parade</i>	36
<i>Private Robb of the Transport</i>	37
<i>Reservists</i>	38
<i>The Ballad of Jimmie Grier</i>	40
<i>Turkish Spring Song, 1941</i>	44
<i>Sunday Morning, Tobruk</i>	48
<i>Towards the East</i>	49

V. FORAY

<i>Heritage</i>	54
<i>Calling on the Cattle</i>	56
<i>Return to Burma</i>	58
<i>Glossary and Notes</i>	60

Foreword

AS SOME of these verses are in Lowland Scots, a word about their spelling may be useful.

I have not used phonetic spelling (e.g. *hoose* for *house*, *thocht* for *thought*) since in my view such a practice disfigures the text and dismays the reader. The Scottish reader requires no such aids, since he can determine the appropriate pronunciation from the context and from the character into whose mouth the words are put. The English reader should not worry about the matter at all.

I gratefully acknowledge the kindness of the Editor and Proprietors of *Punch* for permission to reproduce seventeen of these verses; of Mr. James Blackwood, of *Blackwood's Magazine*, for permission to use three; of the Editors and Proprietors of *The Scots Magazine* for two, and of the *Field*, *Country Life* and *Cornhill* for one each.

BERNARD FERGUSON

Hill Paths

THE HEATHIER HOUSE

SWILL blows the wind from Carrick Shore,
 The bitter spray from Ailsa bringing,
 About this steading where no more
 Is heard the sound of mirth and singing,
 But at the very step of the door
 The heather's springing

The hearth long warm is cold to-day,
 No gangrel knocks its warmth to borrow;
 The walls are slipping fast away
 And maybe they will fall to-morrow;
 A whaup, half hidden in the brace,
 Pours out his sorrow.

Since eighty years the steading sleeps,
 The haunt of plover, whaup, and starling;
 Across the hill the sea-wind sweeps
 Past Auchengairn towards Cairn Carline,
 And year by year the heather creeps
 About its darling.

TINKLERS

SOON the winter quarters of the tinklers will be garrisoned,

For see them on the southward road, a motley cavalcade
Of covered carts and caravans and shelties all caparisoned
With pots and pans and wickerwork, the gear of tinkler
trade.

Their fathers' rocky fastnesses are refuges no more to
them,

Loch Enoch boulders stand forlorn in mountain mist
and rain;

But still men leave the lonely caves along the western
shore to them,

And ancient tinkler ashes there will soon be warm
again.

For Little Egypt's folk will fill Kirroughtrie and Dirk
Hatteraick's

And Sawney Bean's and Catebraids and all the caves
about,

And Reids and Shaws and Dicks and Faas and Marshalls
and Macatericks

Stuff sacks across the cavern mouths to keep the winter
out.

There will they bide till April come to bid them venture
forth again;

On modern roads in ancient trails their caravans will
fare

Through Rhins and Shire and Stewartry before they
rumble north again

By the Bailiary of Carrick and the Sherifffdom of Ayr.

Then look you for the tinkler's cart; and haggling over
things in it,

If you should see a cooking pot or stumble on a stew,
Yet be not overmuch surprised to find a pair of wings in it
That fluttered in your doo'cote once when they belonged
to you.

RAIN OVER TWEEDDALE

OVER the hill comes the rain like a blanket,
Over the Hennel, Glengaber, and Dean;
Ploughmen and herds nutter, "Heaven be thankit!
Here comes the rain for the weeks that hae been."

Soon in the Tweed will the salmon be leaping,
Soon, for already they listen and think.
"Surely by now the Quair Water is sweeping
Rowth o' good feeding away from its brink."

Pigeon are dreaming in Purvishill Tower,
"To-morrow the blaes will be tastier yet";
Trout in Loch Eddy are sniffing the shower:
Dreich was the day, but the night will be wet.

It's raining fell hard over Teviotdale;
Ettrick is in it, and Yarrow, and Ale;
And the fisherman thinks, with his last cigarette:
"Dreich was the day, but the night will be wet."

LOCH LAGGANSIDE

DRINK cider in Brittany,
Cider in Devon,
Vouvray in Tours.
And nectar in heaven.

Elsewhere if you wish you may stay on the waggon
So you drink usquebaugh in the inn at Loch Laggan,
For it's smooth as the milk in a Galloway churn
And brown as the peat in a Badenoch burn,
So pull off your boots and have done with your roaming
And watch the white hills turn to red in the gloaming.

The sun's going down
At the back of Ben Nevis,
And shadows are lying
On corrie and crevice;
High up on the forest are ptarmigan crying
And low in the larches the cushies are sighing;
On the road is a tinker lad whistling a reel,
The burn's making ever its own port-a-beul,
And there where it runs through Ardverikie meadow
The trees seem to hear it and dance to their shadow.

Come swallow your tipple
And in to your bed,
It's a long day behind
But a longer ahead,
For we go by Glen Shirra the first of the day
And strike the old road where it crosses the Spey;
Corryarrick's to tackle, all smothered in snow,
Before we drop down by the Tarff and Glen Doe
To the Loch and the Abbey, where, done with our roaming,
We watch the white hills turn to red in the gloaming.

POST-EASTER

MO THURIAIGH, my sorrow! At seven to-morrow
I have to be back in a garrison town,
And the bus that's to carry me far from Glengarry
Already 'awaits at the door of Tomdown.
No porridge to sup, no rod to put up,
No waders to pull on my legs;
I'm going away: no fishing to-day,
To-night, no bacon and eggs.

The fish in the river are bigger than ever;
I've seen half a dozen whose size who can guess?
So I must willynilly believe the old gillie:
"There's monsters in Garry as well as in Ness!"
But I'll see them no more along Puilleary shore
Or the haughs of the river below,
For my rod and my reel, my waders and creel
Are packed: I'm ready to go.

To-morrow, Reveille will wake me,
And my dreams and my memories fade,
Or maybe my servant will shake me
And tell me I'm late for parade;
But from here, where the fish will be lying
Close in by the Puilleary shore,
Some wind may come seeking me, sighing,
"Lochaber no more."

TRUNK CALL

FOR me alone the silver wires
Go streaming northward through the shires,
Past sleeping villages and spires
And through illumined cities.
I wait until your bell shall ring,
Five hundred miles encompassing:
Till then they stand and softly sing
Their own Aeolian ditties.

They dip in many an English vale
And many a northern hill they scale
Till up they sweep through Annandale
Across the Scottish Border;
Then steeply falling to the plains
Of Clydesdale, swollen with the rains,
By Hamilton and by Newmains
They hurry at my order.

Southward they turn for fifty miles
(Dark in the west the hidden isles),
By Cunningham's bare hills, and Kyle's,
And then at last by Carrick's;
And now I know their journey well;
Each twist and turning I can tell;
From far away I hear your bell,
From Aldershot, in barracks.

And in my fancy I can see
The last peg on the wizened tree
Outside your window, bringing me
Three minutes' worth of heaven.
Answer, and open wide the door:
I'm in the smoking-room once more,
At home on leave, and only for
A shilling, after seven.

OCTOBER

WITH game-books telling the tale of grouse,
With sleepers booked on the London train,
The English tenants have left the house,
And the laird comes back to his own again.
With the big rooms shut and the dust-sheets spread,
Full half of the house is sunk in gloom;
But not for us, for we seek instead
The fire of logs in the smoking-room.

Soon is the best of the year, I think,
When the autumn woods are brown and thin,
The roads with feathery ice a-clink,
The tenants out and the woodcock in,
The lochs in the hills as hard as stone,
The floor of the valley astir with duck,
When a man can travel the woods alone
With a dog and a gun to try his luck.

The best of the year; though, sooth to say,
Sad was the laird and sad his sons,
Thinking in August, far away,
How the grouse were falling to alien guns.
Yet, cubbing now in an English shire,
The tenant may think his cup is full,
But nothing he knows of our larchwood fire,
And the duck that come to a certain pool.

This is October: let him dream,
Happy enough in his Saxon creed,
Having shot the moor he has skimmed the cream
And the year is done with North of Tweed.
There's a bitter wind and a threat of snow,
But soon the pheasants begin to fly,
And, drawing close to the fire, we know
That nothing can shift us till July.

TO THE YOUNGEST BEATER OF ALL

JOHNNIE MCCRINDLE, youngest and best of the beaters,
Wearing what used long ago to be one of my suits,
Stoutest of fellows as well as the heartiest of eaters,
Alike undeterred by your size and the weight of your
boots—
Though the guns they may miss, though the stops and
the keepers may bungle,
Though the undergrowth's over your bonnet and you
in the dark,
Nevertheless
From the darkest recess
Of the jungle,
'It's you that says "Mark!"

Often I've watched you, undaunted by bracken or bramble,
Blithely belabouring tree-trunks with whistle and
shout
In places where Willie McHaffie or Alastair Campbell
Throw pride to the devil and turn on their heel and
come out.
We wouldn't have taken you on were it not for your
pleading,
But now that you're here, for the sake of a meal and
a bob,
Though your knees and your shins
Are torn with the whins
Till they're bleeding,
You stick to your job.

You never falter; not for a moment you slacken,
Crashing your way through the larches or splashing
through bog,
Leaping a burn or a dyke, or rampaging through bracken,
Better by far than a man and as well as a dog.
Worrying through with your shoulders and head like a
spaniel,
You emerge from the covert in time for the last of the
fun,
With the menacing air
Of one who would dare
To be Daniel
And Esau in one.

This is the last of the season; to-morrow we scatter,
You to your schooling and I to my troops far from here;
You will be bigger and I just a little bit fatter
When the pheasants and we meet again at the end of
the year.
I may put a brave face on the end of my leave, but the fact is
Away in the South I'll be feeling forlorn and bereft:
In my dreams now and then
Send me over the glen
Just for practice,
A high right and left!

II

Country Folk

THE KILKERRAN SHEPHERD

(Psalm xxiii)

W^HA but the Lord will be my herd?
By Girvan Water side he's led me,
And in the bonnie holms of Aird
With heavenly pasture has he fed me.

My feckless soul he'll turn and bless,
E'en through the glamour of his name,
Intae the pads o' righteousness,
Sweeter nor a' the roads o' hame.

Though in Death's glowerin' glen I gang,
Nae scunner will it gar me gie.
Thou'rt at my side, thy kent is lang,
And surely it will comfort me.

A table for me thou hast spreid
Where nane can win wad wark my doom;
Thy clouds drop fatness on my heid,
My tass has never fallen toom.

Thy kindliness will follow me—
Fu' weel I ken it—a' my days;
And I will bigg a house to thee,
Where'er I gang, o' prayer and praise.

THE TRYST

SHE was the lassie to redd the house
And bake the scones on the fire;
He was the laddie to tent the cows
And bring them ben to the byre.
These were the twa; and sure they swore
To meet at the road-end late:
'Twas the lassie that never cam but the door,
And the laddie that gaed his gate.

A sodger laddie that stands and daffs
At the slock of a clarty close,
With a queyn o' the toun that lichtly laughs
Wi' lips as reid as a rose;
A farmer's lassie that dreams o' both,
And greets, for she canna sleep
For the bitter thought of a broken troth
And a tryst that she didna keep.

•

OLD WOMAN'S SONG

AYE first on the flair and hinmaist aff it—
Yon was the way
When I was a lass;
But now there is gray
On my ilka haffet,
And I'm no sae gleg on the feet as I was.

I was aye on the flair when the fiddle scrapit
For the auld-time dance,
And I dancit weel:
But the folk frae the manse
Aye flytit and threepit
That Bessie McGill was gaun tae the deil.

“Petronella” and “Strip the Willow,”
“Triumph” and “Floo'ers,”
I ken them a';
Few were the hours
I lay on my pillow,
When there was a dance in the village ha'.

Owre lang on the flair, and it's time I flittit;
My pairtner's gane
A while sinsyne;
I lie my lane,
No sweir tae quit it,
The life that I thought sae sair tae tine.

TRAFFIC LIGHTS COME TO
PULQUHANITY

ME cross the lights when they're fornent me?
Awa', ye gowk, and haud yer gab!
These thirty year this street has kent me,
Me and ma cuddy and ma cab.
Nae argy-bargy! You begun it:
Ye needna flap yer mouth at me;
I ken ye in yon fancy polis bunnet—
Ye're only Tam McGhie.

Whit's ta'en the Provost and the Bailies?
It's gyte they're gane, ye'll no deny;
They've got the Rory-Bory-Alis,
Whit fireworks div they need forbye?
Wi' thon constabulary felly
They've spiled the bonniest o' streets
Wi' "Stop" and "Go" in red and green and yally,
Like conversation sweets.

That's juist the worst o' polis forces;
Ye see, ye pudden-heided gowk,
Thae lights is no designed for horses,
They're juist tae please the motor-fowk;
So save yer breath! Ye daurna summon,
Ye'd hae the hale toun on yer track;
Awa' and bully some puir widdy-wumman!
Weel, I've enjyed our crack.

THE COCKNEY

SHE came a proper Cockney from the sound of the Bells
of Bow

To rule in a Highland nursery at the foot of a Western
glen;
And since the day of her coming full thirty years ago
She has raised for the world her brood of Highlandmen.

Lorn is far from London, and maybe she used to pine
For the fleet of prams and children and nannies in the
Park,
And see in the lonely wildfowl the ducks of the Serpentine
As she gazed across Loch Etive in the dark.

Strange tongues below her window would murmur in the
byre,
And in the nursery scuttle lay unaccustomed peat;
She would watch the train to London toil up towards
Strathyre
And dream of buses in a London street.

Now in an empty nursery she sits alone and sews
At a window facing Cruachan, grown friendly with the
years—
Grown friendly with the sharing of nursery joys and woes,
The bursts of laughter and the sudden tears.

Her Highlandmen are grown now and scattered far and
wide,
In dingy English cities or under an Indian sun;
But dreams of the glen that bred them stray back to
Etiveside:
They think of Lorn and home and her as one.

MATTHEW

TALK of a chap that can fish
With a threid and a needle!
Man, but I wish
I could dae it as weel as the beadle.
Some of us spend
Half a day by the side of the water;
Doun comes thon chap at the end,
Ae cast and he's got her,
Dod, but he's fell as an otter!

See'm on the Sabbath gaun in
With his buiks to the pulpit:
Ye'd say he was thin,
Peelywally, bow-leggit and shilpit—
Naethin' like Knox,
Naethin' like Calvin or Luther;
But see'm gaun doun to the rocks
With his rod on his shouther,
Deidlier far nor gunpouter.

He startit to fish as a wean;
He plunkit the school
And caught with a preen
Seeven trouts in the Gigmagog pool;
Folk in they hotels,
Fishin' on Leven and Lomon',
Never come near to his totals
O' trouties or saumon.
I'm sayin' the felly's uncommon!

Whiles I've jaloused that it's weird,
For the beadle's a bauld ane,
Whiles I'm gey feared
That he's tradit his saul with the Auld Ane.
Gin it's the truth,
Nae ferlie he's able to bate us,
For he hasna his match north or sooth,
Frae Wick to the Gatehouse.
But I doot that it means he's forfeeted his amateur
status!

•

III

Little Ships

THE LIGHTS OF CLYDE

O LIGHTS of Clyde, how bravely
You brought us laggards home,
Your lighthouse windows winking
Above the splashing foam;
The last yacht of the season
To make for Holy Loch,
By Corsewall Point, and Pladda,
And Cumbrae and the Cloch!

It thrust me back in fetters,
That first October storm;
It put away my sweaters,
Put out my uniform.
It's blowing now and hailing
Enough to make you sob:
My mind is full of sailing
Though soldiering's my job.

But in a yard at Chiswick,
Not far from Camberley,
I've found the proper physic
To mind me of the sea.

Full lucky were the cravings
That led me to the place,
For there among the shavings
My vessel grows apace.

So now, my faithful shiners,
Beloved lights of Clyde!
Steer home the tramps and liners
Safe through the wind and tide.
The winter sun shines briefly;
When all too soon it dips,
Be kind to all, but chiefly
Be kind to little ships.

And every time you see one,
And while you flash and swing,
Think kindly of the wee one
I'm bringing in the spring;
That you may steer her safely
By every ísle and loch,
By Corsewall Point and Pladda,
By Cumbrae and the Cloch.

CALLER HERRIN': NEW STYLE

FROM Carradale, from Carradale,
The fishing boats were putting out:
For all that they were built so stout
They looked so frail, so small and frail,
That watching them my heart grew sore
Lest driving on Kilbrannan shore
They came no more to Carradale.

To Carradale, to Carradale,
The boats came chasing with the day
Up from the south'ard, cold and gray
A cloud of sail, full twenty sail,
With crans of herring from the seas
To rot unsold in twos and threes
Along the quays of Carradale.

THE SHIP'S FLY

(An epic of the Highland Brigade Yacht Club)

HE wasn't upon the articles as a member of the crew,
He wasn't upon the passenger list so far as the
owner knew ;
He must have boarded the yacht, we think, as she lay
beside the quay,
But he didn't declare his presence there till two days out
to sea.

We discovered him first off Orfordness; we don't know
where he slept,
But we found him at a clandestine meal in the place where
the jam was kept,
And he seemed to buzz, "I know you're bound from
Ipswich to the Forth:
Well, I'm sorry to say I'm a stowaway, but I'll work my
passage north."

Day by day we'd a following wind, and it looked like a
record trip,
And the new recruit to the starboard watch was the life
and soul of the ship.
In all the duties of shipboard life he willingly played his
part,
And he helped the skipper to navigate by walking about
the chart.

He'd a fine contempt for the Haisburgh Bank, the Cork
and the Middle Sand,
He walked impartially over the sea and flew all over the
land,
He studied the charts and the almanac, the chronometer
and the sextant,
And read each Notice to Mariners that he considered
extant.

But our shipmate at last grew overbold: he thought we
should sail him faster;
His buzz grew insubordinate as he criticised the Master;
He raided a pot of marmalade, and, inspired by such
carousing,
He left the ship to the nor'-nor'-west, on a course for the
. Outer Dowsing.

Alas for his over-confidence! My shipmates think it plain
That the fly of the good ship *Saladin* will never be seen
again.
It may be the gulfs have washed him down far short of
Flamborough Head,
But can it be that such as he is really and truly dead?

Often now in the Middle Watch I scan the angry sea,
And I find my heart and my thoughts go out to my
shipmate's Odyssey.
Does he sojourn now in a boarding-house in an East Coast
seaside town,
Or is he far 'neath an alien star, still running the westing
down?

Even now he may come again, winging his way in the dark,
With a little marmalade in his beak, like the dove to Noah's Ark.
Leave the forehatch wide: there's a fatted calf, in the shape of jam, within,
For the rapturous day when our stowaway comes back to *Saladin*.

WAR AND EASDALE

TEN DAYS since, the last of our leave was over;
Ten days since, we bade farewell to the yacht;
You three thousand miles from the cliffs of Dover,
I not a dozen miles from Aldershot.
Sure I am of the thoughts that each is thinking,
Many a mile apart though we are to-night—
Lismore and Lady Isle and Fladda winking,
Garleffan's riding-light.

Close below on the stove the cocoa's brewing,
That and a cigarette before we sleep;
All around are the islands—Mull and Luing,
Easdale, Kerrera, Lunga, Isle of Sheep;
Out on the bar the Atlantic swell is breaking;
Ghostly vessels that con each leading-mark
Inward borne on the last of the flood are making
Easdale Sound in the dark.

Here we lie in the gut, where ships in plenty
Long ago in the quarrying days have lain;
Lost and lone in the anchorage where twenty
Slate-ships swung of old to a groaning chain.
Soon we'll sleep, and the lights go out around us
One by one in the cottages on the shore,
The peace of a sleeping haven to surround us,
Never a sough of war.

There you have it, the dream that each is dreaming,
Brother and brother, separate many a mile;
Limned for one in the wake of a vessel steaming
Grim and remorseless slowly up the Nile,
Limned for the other here in the Hampshire heather—
The dream that each shall dream whate'er betide;
Till brother and brother we sail once more together,
Outward bound from the Clyde.

IV

Peace and War

THE REGIMENT GOES NORTH

B LUE BONNETS over the Border!
The Regiment's hurrying north
From the fat green plains of the Saxon
To the hills beside the Forth.
Down the last long slope of the Cheviots
The wheels of the hurrying train
Go thundering over the sleepers,
Singing our hearts' refrain:

*Here we come hurrying home from our exile,
Thundering north in a friendly train,
Rollicking down the long shoulder of Cumberland
Back to the hills, the hills again.
Far to the east, the shadows of Annandale
Spring in the dawn from out of the plain,
Far to the west the mountains of Galloway—
Back to the hills, the hills again!*

Blue Bonnets over the Border!
But not this time to the south.
The song of the train is lilting
In every soldier's mouth,
And when in the mirk of the morning
We cross by the Gretna Burn,
Will the hearts of the long dead reivers not be stirring
For joy at our return?

"MY HOME"

FOUR O'CLOCK, and upon the square
Pipes and Drums are playing Retreat.
Clear the sound on the frosty air,
Crisp the gravel beneath their feet.
But the tune is sad to a soldier, for
Mo Dhachaidh, "My Home," is the pipers' lilt,
And our hearts are back in the days before
We took the shilling and donned the kilt.

None regrets; but the days were brave
When still we followed our fathers' plough,
Wrought the coal in a living grave,
Or herded sheep on the mountain's brow;
Then a poaching ploy, on a night like this,
With a couple of hares for a homeward load,
Or a village dance, and a stolen kiss
From a neighbour lass on the moonlit road.

Glendaruel! The tune has changed;
No more *Mo Dhachaidh* the pipers play,
And our hearts are back from the road they ranged
Over the hills and far away;
Back with dreams of heather and hill,
Of Angus strath and Galloway glen—
Dreams to harry and haunt us till
"Hey, Johnnie Cope!" shall wake us again.

IN CAMP: CHURCH PARADE

"The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down into silence. But we will praise the Lord from this time forth and for evermore. Praise the Lord."—Psalm cxv.

TWO HOURS since, we rose to the sound of Reveille,
Now we climb the hill to "Liberton Boys";
From the line of tents, below in the dusty valley,
We come to the Lord, to make him a joyful noise.

And a joyful noise we make, for the hills are ringing
To the Hundred and Twenty-First, as they well may
be;
We lift our eyes to the hills, the while we are singing,
And find the hand of the Lord in all we see.

Small kirks lie in the folds of the hills around us,
Each of them is loud with the sound of praise;
But the hills themselves with the winds of God have
drowned us,
Louder yet with his promise of length of days.

The kirks shall crumble away by road and river
And the grass grow green where our tents have stained
it brown;
But our praise is one with the praise of the winds for ever,
And into the Silence we shall not go down.

PRIVATE ROBB OF THE TRANSPORT

HE was born on his father's farm in the Neuk o' Fife.
Winter and summer there, with his elder brothers,
He's minded his father's horses all his life,
But now he minds another's.

Since ever he left the school he's wrought on the land,
Reaper and plough, his brothers and he together,
Strong of arm, and ruddy of skin, and tanned
With the vigour of wind and weather.

Now whether his father died, or the farm was sold,
Or whether he loved a lass that proved unwilling,
Whatever his story was, he never told
How he came to take the shilling.

He could not handle his arms, and he could not drill;
The sorriest gowk was a Grenadier beside him,
And we thought to send him back to the plough, until
In the transport lines we tried him.

There he stays and thrives and works like a black,
And whistles blithe as a lark from dawn to gloaming
(I heard "The Boatie Rows" but a minute back,
As he bent to his currycombing).

His horse is sleek and fit, and his leather shines,
And the rest of his soldiering days he's like to spend
there,
For he's found a Neuk o' Fife in the transport lines,
And a horse to be his friend there.

RESERVISTS

WHAT'S the matter, what's the matter
In the Quartermaster's Store?
What's the coarse and cheery chatter
Like the gulls on Carrick shore?
Oh, it's each man has to find him
Rifle, mess-tin, boots, and pack,
And there's hundreds more behind him—
The Reservists coming back!

Still they come and do not tarry,
Morning, evening, still they come;
There's a ferryman from Garry,
There's a ploughman from Kirkcolm;
Still they come in any order,
Faces strange and faces kent:
There's a shepherd from the Border,
There's a grocer from Tranent;

There are collier-lads from Methil,
There are crofters from Strathyre,
There are stalkers down from Atholl,
There are gillies from Kintyre;
And there's many a cheery body
From the towns along the sea—
Men of Culross and Kirkcaldy
And Dunfermline and Dundee;

There are some St. Andrews caddies,
There are some are out of work,
There's a wheen of Glasgow Paddies
That were never in a kirk:
Though my memory's appalling,
I can mind them just the same
As I watch them come, recalling
Every long-forgotten name.

Still they come, and on a sudden
Every fibre of me throbs
With the memories of Buddon
And of Barry and of Stobs;
All the camps and all the training
And the laughter down the line,
Maryhill for ever raining
And the dust of Palestine.

They have drawn their goods and chattels,
They are marching to the war,
To the billets and the battles
That their fathers knew before;
And their tongues will all be dinning,
In the manner of their kind,
Reminiscences beginning,
"Do ye mind, sir? Do ye mind?"

I can hear what they are saying,
I can see them, every man;
I can hear the pipers playing
"Highland Laddie" in the van;
They were never there about me
In the Quartermaster's Store:
They are marching off without me
To the war, to the war.

THE BALLAD OF JIMMIE GRIER

FINE I mind him as a rootie,
Fresh and clarty f'ae the ploo;
He cam up f'ae Invermuty
In the spring o' Thirty-two.
He was gey and like a cadger—
Losh, hoo a' the fellows laughed!
He was sic a clumsy sodger
And the hinmaist o' the draft.

When the officer cam round us
For tae speir us a' wur names,
Here, wee Jimmie fair astound' us
When he cries himsel as "James"!
And his mess-tin was "ma tinny,"
And his hackle was "ma floo'er,"
So the boys a' ca'ed him "Jinny,"
Or "The Belle o' Kirriemuir."

The recruitin' sergeant wandered
Or was maybe short o' men,
For he wasnae near the standard
That the Airmy askit then;
We gaed down to the Battalion
At the back-end o' the year,
And I lookit like Schiehallion
By the side o' Jimmie Grier.

Och, I tell ye it was grand sport
For tae see him, nane the less,
For they tried him in the Transport
And they tried him in the Mess;
But the lad f'ae Invermuty
He caused naethin' but alairm,
So they pit him back tae duty
Whaur he cudnae dae nae hairm.

There's a thing ca'ed Foreign Service;
And in Mairch o' Thirty-Three,
Though I dancit like a Dervish,
It was Punkieland for me;
And although he beggit plenty,
And he ca'ed upon his God,
Jimmie Grier he wasnae twenty
And he cudnae gang abroad.

Well, I wudnae tell a story
And I wudnae bum ma load,
And I didnae seek for glory
For I didnae see ma road;
But I never took a tape, lads,
So I wasnae like to greet
But was happy to escape, lads,
And get back tae Civvy Street.

Then the War broke out, and damn me!
I was happy tae get back,
Searchin' a'wheres for a rammy
Wi' a rifle and a pack;
Ye may think I'm kin' o' blawin',
But I'm single and I'm Scotch,
And if there's some trouble goin',
Well, ma place is in the Watch.

At the Depot there was ither
Fower-and-twenty o' ma squad;
Since we'd a' gaun oot thegither,
Well, I didna think it odd.
But when we was postit foreign
And we reached Jerusalem,
I near trippit owre ma sporran—
There was Jimmie, C.S.M.!

And the wee bit shilpit laddie
That I'd kent in Thirty-Two,
Like a hauf a finnan haddie,
He was big as me or you;
And the lad that cam sae greasy
F'ae the Invermuty ploos—
Ye could cut your throat and easy
On the creases o' his trews!

There was never Crown and Anchors
If he cam within a mile;
He wad up and get ye Jankers
If he saw a bittie smile;
And although I never speired him—
'Twas a thing he couldnae tell—
I jaloused the Captain feared him
Near as much as I mysel!

Give him Gairman or Italian,
They were a' wur Jimmie's meat,
And he fought wi' the Battalion
In Somaliland and Crete;
And f'ae nocht that was his duty
Was he ever seen tae jouk,
Till the lad f'ae Invermuty
Stopped a bullet in Tobruk.

There was mony mair afore him,
There'll be mony mair ahint;
It's a mighty war that tore him,
And it's all of us is in't;
Though the end is no in sight yet,
And it may nae come for years,
Still there's plenty Jocks tae fight yet,
And a hantle Jimmie Griers.

TURKISH SPRING SONG, 1941

FRESHLY smelled the April loam
Round the Turkish aerodrome;
Loudly sprawled the river close,
Brimming high with Taurus snows.
Cocked my ear and cocked my eye
Southward towards the Cypriot sky
Whence my aeroplane should come:
All was empty, all was dumb.

"Never heed!" cried Zekhi Bey;
"Let us charm an hour away.
Emin! Chefki! bring us here
Raki, olives, bread and beer!
Let us sit in yon kiosk
By the gateway of the mosque."
From both wind and sunshine housed,
There we sat, and there caroused.

While we supped and idled there
On simple Anatolian fare
(Bitter bread and sour curds,
Such as use Cilician herds),
Taurus from his icy peaks
Dripped the snows of many weeks,
Where, all-conquering and far-seen,
Clomb the advancing line of green.

Then the General, Zekhi Bey,
Hailed the beauty of the day;
Sinking in his chair, his eye
Upward turned towards the sky;

He began, with measured beat,
Persian verses to repeat,
Musing of the burgeoning
And the beauty of the spring.

As he spoke, the Seyhan strong
Murmured still its deeper song;
Swayed the blossoms, white and gold,
As the dreamy cadence rolled;
And the birds beyond him seemed
Even to sing as though redeemed;
And the ploughs that turned the soil
Seemed to find it easier toil.

As he spoke, I would have thought
Of the fields my own folk wrought,
Of the well-remembered knowe
Where their shares were wont to plough,
Of the hill the cattle climb
Homeward through the April slime,
Of the farmtown and the byre,
And the bakings on the fire.

Yet my thoughts were far from these—
On the hapless refugees
I had seen a week before
Pressing fast by Marmara shore
With their all on bullock-carts,
Heading not for friendly marts,
Plodding East that they might live,
Helpless, hungry, fugitive.

High those wretched carts were piled,
Beds and furniture and child,
Chattels they were loath to lose,
Treasures that none else would choose,
Cooking-vessels tier on tier,
Querns and suchlike country gear,
Even as folk would bear away
In Carrick or in Galloway.

Saw I too the sentries stand
On the frontiers of their land,
Trusting in archaic arms
Even in these new alarms,
Gazing from Chatalja ridge
Down upon the wooden bridge
Which the foeman, as he went,
Easily would circumvent.

Saw I too the luckless Greeks
Crowding into small caiques,
Puzzled, lost, defenceless, dumb,
Fleeing from the wrath to come,
Hasting down the mountain trails,
Hoisting patched, demented sails,
Rowing from abandoned ports
Past the undefended forts.

Saw I too the wrath of dule
Hanging over proud Stamboul!
Heedless of the doom which lay
Heavy on the world that day,
There the waves still broke in snow
On the rocks of Prinkipo,
And the clamour rose with morn
Loud along the Golden Horn.

These behind; and what before?
From the Cyrenaican shore
Every hour the tidings told
How the Germans onward rolled,
How each desperate rearguard stand
Crumbled into dust and sand,
How, and at what sickening cost,
Every pass was fought and lost.

O, how sweet the April loam
Smelled, and minded me of home!
And the swirling river close,
Mighty with the melting snows!
All around me seemed to sing
The nativity of spring;
Yet, while all around was Birth,
Death was creeping o'er the earth.

SUNDAY MORNING, TOBRUK

THIS Sunday morning, from afar
The wind cuts like a scimitar,
Searching and snell and stinging;
Yet, huddling craven from its chill,
I hear the bird across the hill
And marvel at its singing.

I know not if it truly knows
It sings between the lines of foes,
So wide and yet so narrow;
I know not if that glorious rush
Of praise be from a Christian thrush
Or from a Moslem sparrow;

I know not in what place is set
The pulpit or the minaret
From which it sings and preaches,
From which, across the bitter air,
It calls the faithful few to prayer
From all that terror teaches;

I only know that in its song
Pours out the wisdom stored so long
From old Saint Francis' sermon,
And all unwittingly it sings
The beauty of eternal things
To Scotsman and to German.

But, while I hear its mellow notes
Spread outward to invisible throats,
Waking to Sabbath wonder,
Beyond the wire, beyond my post,
Beyond the Midianitish host,
The guns begin to thunder.

TOWARDS THE EAST

REMOTE from pilgrimage, a dusty hollow
Lies in the Libyan plain:
And there my comrades sleep, who will not follow
The pipes and drums again:
Who followed closely in that desperate sally
The pipes that went before;
Who, heedless now of Muster or Reveille,
Sleep sound for evermore.

In days of peace, when days of war were nearing,
My comrades who are dead
Once in a while looked up the dark track, peering
Where Fate and Glory led:
For these, the chosen of their generation,
This was the path it took,
That ended in the sand and desolation
Ten miles beyond Tobruk.

Their passing on that field and on that morning
No second sight foresaw;
We spied no wraith, we had no seer's warning
Like him of Inverawe,

Who heard, when yon dark memory was fading,
Ticonderoga's name,
Grappled with Fate, and scaled the palisading,
And died at grips with Fame.

Far off in Scotland at the hour of battle,
As these her sons fell dead,
Above the herds of frosty-breathing cattle
The winter sun rose red:
In every cothouse and in every city
In those remembered shires,
The kettle sang its early morning ditty
On newly kindled fires.

To those dear houses with their chimneys reeking
In Angus or in Fife,
No spirit came, its words of omen speaking,
To mother or to wife;
Yet in the homeless desert to the southward
Before the sun was high,
The husbands whom they loved, the sons they mothered
Stood up and went to die.

Once there were peaceful dawns in other places
In days when war was not:—
Friends sprawling with the firelight on their faces
Around the cooking-pot:
Dawn on the Essex saltings, by whose margins
The teal and widgeon hide,
Where up the brimming swatchways come the barges
Creeping upon the tide;

Dawn on the Border, and the sound of shooting
High up on Penchrist Pen,
The echoes rolling backward and saluting
The firing-point again;
Dawn in the Castle, and the early scurry
Of waking soldiers' feet,
And far below the grinding haste and hurry
Of trams in Princes Street;

Dawn on the coast: the wind in bents and grasses
Along the Buddon dunes,
Stumbling among the sandhills as it passes,
Echoing ancient tunes;
Dawn in the ship, the sentry at the hatches
Strange in his new abode,
The mugs for coffee passing aft in batches,
The hammocks being stowed;

Dawn in Judaea, and the threat of pillage
Upon the Holy Land,
The search at sunrise through a mountain village
For a marauding band;
Dawn in Somaliland and dawn in Aden,
Dawn on the hills of Crete,
Dawn on the cruiser's deck, with soldiers laden,
And on the rescuing fleet. :

.

For Time devoured our Day, and Night came creeping
And Peace was lost in War,
And now upon my friends the sands are heaping
(Who sleep for evermore);

And I, who shared their joys but not their dangers,
Their pride but not their pain,
Mindful of them, though in the midst of strangers,
March to the field again.

I march at night; the stars come up to guide me
Safe on the jungle track—
O for the friends that well might be beside me,
The stout hearts at my back!
O for the piper, striding towards the morning,
Half hidden in the gloom,
Playing my choice—"Steamboat," "The Gypsy's
Warning,"
"The Wee Man at the Loom"!

The jackals scream, the landmarks pass, the stages
Are made and drop behind;
The stars that scan all warriors down the ages
Look on me and are kind—
The soldier stars that pace the beats of heaven,
To whom all things are known;
Who watch the fields where men of old have striven
And who shall watch our own.

.

The night brails up her darkness like a curtain,
The morning star grows pale,
Till suddenly the hope is sure and certain
That death cannot prevail;
And in my need my comrades send assurance
That breaks on me with day
That from the grave that sealed their long endurance
The stone is rolled away.

The dawn is here: the sound of water flowing
Proclaims my bivouac;
Behind, the marching feet suspend their going
And leave the jungle track.
To-day, the little force that sleeps around me
Is marvellously increased:
To-night, with comrades who have claimed and found
me,
I march towards the east.

Syria, 1942—Burma, 1943.

V

Foray

HERITAGE

"Black Watch in action eleven hours to-day. Severe casualties inflicted on enemy. Own killed two officers, twenty-four men. Details later."—Chindit Official Telegram.

ANOTHER field is fought; a little fight
Not to be famed in chronicles of war,
Not to be noticed in the News to-night
Nor cabled eagerly to lands afar.
Only upon the regimental scrolls
Begun long since, the day of Fontenoy,
Among old skirmishes and lost patrols
They will record to-night this latest ploy.

Now, where to-day the sun blazed overhead,
In the cool evening moving to and fro
Their comrades bury the immortal dead
For ever from the sight of friend and foe.
And round them in the darkness sentries stand
And watch with tired eyes and straining ears,
Even as long ago in our old land
Their weary kinsfolk leaned upon their spears.

In old wild days, if one should chance to fall,
The son caught up the broadsword of the slain,
Girt on the dirk and the accoutrements all
And saw to it the ranks were whole again;
So now, as sure as when in ancient days
Brave youth espoused the patriarchal feud,
Still, in the fashion of our modern ways,
The oath of Aberfeldy is renewed.

We know not yet the comrades who are down,
Who are the two and who the twenty-four
That shall not see again the country town,
The pithead or the cothouse or the moor,
From whence they came to fill their fathers' place,
To keep the long heroic line unbroke,
The seed, the fruit, the harvest of their race,
The latest warriors of a fighting folk.

From such small battles was a Kingdom built,
By such bold forays was a Border held,
By men in hodden gray or tattered kilt
Who knew defeat, but knew not to be quelled;
And they that fell to-day were of a blood
That cannot all be drunk by greedy earth,
And whoso fell in honour where he stood
Fulfilled the purpose of his warrior birth.

•

CALLING ON THE CATTLE

THE lasses gang to fetch the kye
And "Hurly, hurly, hurly!" cry:
The bestial come, and come would I.

.

Call on your cattle, lasses!
Call them home to their bield,
Brushing through the wet grasses
Of the low riverside field.
Call them home with your singing
Up the Dungeon Brae and mire,
With their clumsy rumps swinging
Towards Craigoch byre.

That's the familiar gloaming
That I knew when I was a lad,
With the pigeon to Falaird homing
And the schoolchildren on the pad,
And the pony going up to the stable,
And the smell of the larches in the rain,
High tea at the factor's table
And the 4.15 train.

And the Scots firs stick and pithy,
And the water in the blocked pens,
And the fire dying down in the smithy,
And the eggs being filched from the hens,

And the foresters and the keepers,
 Their boots heavy with loam,
And the railwaymen walking on the sleepers,
 All going home.

Call on the cattle clearly!
 In the evening home seems near:
God knows that I love it dearly
 And perhaps I shall hear;
Perhaps in bivouac or battle
 Some evening it may befall
I shall hear you calling on the cattle,
Carrick voices calling on the cattle,
 And come to the call.

Burma Border, January, 1944.

RETURN TO BURMA

O COMRADES whom we left unsepulchred,
O comrades whom we laid in shallow graves,
O lightly sleeping comrades, have you heard
The sound that beats insistent as the waves?
Up the dark alleys of the jungle-tracks
Where once you stumbled with your monstrous packs,
It flows, the tide that liberates the slaves.

I heard you speaking in the quiet nights
When all the birds are hushed, the crickets still,
When the pale fire-flies with their shuddering lights
Cruise in the archipelagos of the hill,
When up the mighty corridors of teak
Along the secret woodway from the creek
Pads the great cat returning to his kill,

When the black shadows reach across the path,
When from the village dies the evening smoke,
When from the mere steams the sun's aftermath,
When in the marsh the frogs begin to croak,
The hour when we were wont to bivouac,
To choose our sleeping-place and leave the track,
Kindle the fire and put the rice to soak.

Then you have spoken, for you have desired
To know our varying fortunes, how we fared,
Trudging in weariness but still inspired
To press again the venture that we shared.
Then in the night I was aware of you,
So lightly laid as still to share the dew
Falling on us your friends for whom you cared.

Forest to forest, range to distant range,
Across the vales your voices speak and say:
"Here where I lie, to-day was nothing strange—
Heard you, my comrade, anything to-day?"
And one makes answer: "Here where we two lie
Four hundred of our countrymen went by—
We saw them laughing as they went their way."

And one beside a track more distant yet,
One from a group of graves, some old, some new,
Says soberly: "To-day our comrades met
The enemy by our thicket here, and slew
Twoscore and ten; and some of ours who fell
Lie with us now, and have brave tales to tell."
And voices call: "Comrades, we welcome you."

But you who fell beside us, pioneers
Shorn of the future—you who chose to be
The hopeless van of the victorious years,
The heralds of the day you could not see:
You we have steered on as a seaman's mark,
Your graves shine forth exulting in the dark,
The leading lights of ultimate victory.

O comrades all, the known and the unknown,
Sleep still at last: your vigil is despatched,
The black defences of the night are down,
The outmost wicket of the day unlatched.
This day beyond your graves our armies reach,
The hosts are come for whom you made the breach,
And now at length the enemy is matched.

December, 1944.

Glossary

Ahint	Behind.
Argy-bargy	Argument.
Auld Ane	The Devil.
Bield	Shelter.
Bigg	Build.
Blawin'	Bragging.
Brae	Slope.
Bum ma load	"Shoot a line."
But	Outside, out of.
Cadger	Fish-hawker.
Cam up	Enlisted.
Clarty	Muddy, dirty.
Close	Alley, mean side-street.
Crack	Talk.
Cran	Measure of fish.
Cuddy	Donkey (affectionately, horse).
Cushies	Pigeon.
Daff	Exchange light talk.
Draft	Squad of recruits.
Dreich	Dry.
Ferlie	Wonder.
Flair	Floor.
Flittit	Moved.
Flytit	Scolded.

Forbye	Besides.
Fornent	Opposite.
Gaed his gate	Went his way.
Gleg	Quick.
Gowk	Fool.
Gyte	Foolish.
Hackle	Feathers: "Red Hackle"=Badge of the Black Watch.
Haffet	Temple.
Hantle	Plenty of.
Haud yer gab	Keep your mouth shut.
Herd	Shepherd.
Hinmaist	Hindmost, last.
Hurly	Cry used to summon cattle.
Ilka	Each, every.
Jaloused	Guessed.
Jankers	Detention.
Jouk	Dodge.
Kent	Shepherd's staff.
Kye	Cattle.
Little Egypt	Legendary kingdom of the gypsies.
Mind	Remember.
My lane	By myself.
Pad	Footpath.
Peelywally	Pasty-faced.

Pen	Covered ditch for land drainage.
Plunkit	Played truant from.
Port-a-beul	(Gaelic) mouth-music.
Preen	Pin.
Punkieland	India (from Punkah=fan).
Quern	Stone for grinding grain.
Queyn	Young woman.
Rammy	Rough and tumble.
Redd	Tidy up, put in order.
Rhins	Rhins (of Galloway), the hammerhead promontory in the S.-W. corner of Wigtownshire.
Rootie	Recruit (cp. Rookie).
Rowth	Plenty.
Sair	Sore
Scunner	Shrinking or shuddering from fear
Sheltie	Pony.
Shilpit	Weakly.
Shouther	Shoulder.
Sinsyne	Since.
Slock	Throat, gullet.
Snell	Keen, piercing.
Sough	Whisper of wind; particularly before a rainstorm.
Speir	Ask.
Standard	Height standard.
Stewartry	Stewartry of Kirkcudbright.
Sweir	Reluctant, loath.
Tape	Stripe.
Tent	Look after, watch over.

Threepit	Averred.
Tine	Lose.
Tinklers	Gypsies.
Tinny	Tin Mug.
Toom	Empty.
Usquebaugh	Whisky.
Watch	(The Black) Watch.
Wean	Child.
Wheen	A fair number.

Notes

1. *Ticonderoga*. Campbell of Inverawe dreamed that he would meet his dead brother at a place called Ticonderoga. Several years later, in 1777, while serving in The Black Watch, he heard the name for the first time apart from his dream, when scouts reported the French in strength at that place. He fell during the subsequent assault.

2. *Aberfeldy*. At this village in Perthshire in 1739, The Black Watch was formally converted from its old role of military police into the Highland Regiment. All recruits to the Regiment are taken to visit the Memorial which marks the scene of the parade. Fontenoy was the first engagement of the new Regiment.

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